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Ex-agent tells of CIA's deception

By David Harris

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For the better part of 13 years, John Stockwell believed it all.

He believed that as an agent of the CIA he was working to insure that free nations would remain free and that in subverting leftist movements in the third world, people there could eventually have a better life.

But what had first been a black-and-white view of the world's problems took on disturbing tones of gray, says Stockwell, the former chief of the CIA's task force chief in Angola, who spoke at Vassar College last week.

A once-steadfast conviction that the CIA's activities were justified by the special role it played in protecting the nation's interests turned to a burden on his conscience he could no longer live with.

Over the course of his career, he said he saw CIA personnel in the field fabricate reports to justify their operations — in several nations of Africa and in Vietnam.

He said he saw CIA operatives — foreigners hired by the agency to collect intelligence — killed in such operations although the information could have been obtained through diplomatic channels.

He said he saw the CIA feed phony information to journalists that Cubans fighting in Angola had raped women there. Their stories appeared on the front pages of newspapers across the United States.

And he said he saw Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and CIA director William Colby lie to Congress about the existence of the CIA's covert wars in Angola.

"I'm at a point in my life where my experiences have left me pretty cynical, said Stockwell, 45. "I don't see a lot of hope in the world."

In December of 1976, Stockwell could no longer stand what he been seeing. He resigned from the CIA.

In the intervening years, he has attempted to inform the American public of the truth he says they have been denied.

Stockwell has written "In Search of Enemies," an account of the CIA's secret war in Angola in 1975 and 1976, and has testified before the Senate Oversight Committee on what he thinks can be done with agency.

"We should shut this monster down," he told students Thursday night.

Stockwell, a tall, steady, broad-shouldered man with a striking physical presence, described a life prior to his CIA career that was marked by success.

As an undergraduate at the University of Texas, he was selected to join a cadre of the school's brightest students in an elite liberal arts program "so they didn't have to go all the way to New England to get a good education."

After college, Stockwell did a 19-year stint in the U.S. Marines and rose to the rank of major.

Then, while working at a car dealership in Denver, and more than a little bored, he received a letter from the CIA asking if they could do a background check with the possibility of hiring him.

"I was elated," he said.

During his early and middle years with the agency, Stockwell said he saw many things he questioned, yet cast his doubts aside in the belief that his superiors had knowledge to justify those actions.

A "special access agent" program was in use in 1972, for example, where women operatives would lure foreign diplomats into bed to obtain secrets.

Stockwell said he and another agent obtained from the White House office of the Secret Service the name of one high-level call girl whose clients included governors and senators. In Kenya, she lured a Soviet ambassador into bed and later reported he was alcoholic and impotent, he said.

"We knew he was an alcoholic because we had seen him at parties," he said. "We knew he was impotent because we had a concealed camera in the local whorehouse. That operation cost the American taxpayers \$28,000." In Vietnam, the games were quite different.

In the summer of 1973, he described watching the bodies of 300 South Vietnamese soldiers brought back from an ambush and laid out in the hot sun because there was no place else to store them. The stench was overpowering.

"Anybody that is not a psychopath

would have been struck by the horror," he said.

Toward the end of the war, Stockwell said the CIA was aware of corruption in the South Vietnamese army so acute, that the army was unable to function.

But Kissinger's peace plan hinged the South Vietnamese Army eventually conducting the entire military effort against North Vietnam and the information was suppressed.

When Saigon eventually fell, the CIA left all of its operatives and employees in the country, leaving their future dim at best.

"I didn't feel young and cocky when I came back," he said. "I felt that my soul had been raped."

Stockwell said that the CIA's covert operations in at least nine foreign countries have backlashed and had the effect of increasing the world's hostility towards the United States.

The CIA's operations have resulted directly in the deaths of more than one million people, and have made life very dangerous for millions of others, he said.

"We desperately must reverse our policies of paranoia against communism and seek peaceful solutions," he said. "Or there will be no world in the future."